

In answer to the “True or false” Gaccetta and Sfilio dilemma

After having read the article, published in the December 2010 issue of your magazine, commenting on the words of Alberto Giordano and the conclusions drawn by Philippe Borer, we feel it our duty (seeing we have been mentioned in your article as being Maestro Gaccetta’s pupils Eliano Calamaro and Andrea Franzetti) to supply you with the following details :

- 1) It has mistakenly been written that “the Nicolò Paganini Conservatory of Music in Genoa has created a new course dedicated to Sfilio’s method which has been held by two of Gaccetta’s pupils, Eliano Calamaro and Andrea Franzetti”.

In reality, we just assisted Maestro Gaccetta in two informative seminars. Each seminar was a half-day event open to string instrument teachers interested in participating. The actual course was officially set up by Maestro Gaccetta on the suggestion of Angelo Guaragna, Director of the Conservatory of Music at the time and with the authorisation of the Ministry of Education. This was a two-year course for post-diploma students.

- 2) We find Philippe Borer’s insinuations very serious, in so much as he appears to claim that the Paganini-Sivori-Sfilio lineage was just a good publicity stunt for the ‘Fondazione Sfilio’ and a polishing-up of it’s founder’s musical pedigree. He also claims that Gaccetta practically awaited the death of all those who could still testify lifetime evidence, in order to make the most of this situation.

In reality, the aim of the Foundation has never been to polish-up the Paganini-Sivori-Sfilio lineage, but to spread Sfilio’s teachings (especially thanks to re-publication of his methods), which are believed by many critics and musicians to lead back to his Paganini descent. As far as the polishing up is concerned, if anything the opposite has taken place. It was Gaccetta’s will that even at the height of his career – when he was awarded the Golden Griffin Award, which is the highest award to be assigned by the Italian Republic and the title of Commendatore della Repubblica Italiana – he did not task the Local Authorities to assign him any premises for the Foundation, even though he must certainly have had this opportunity.

Thanks to his modest refrain, he was never offered suitable premises for lessons and activities, deciding to carry on from his own house.

Those who knew him personally, can confirm that his very modest dwellings were far from suitable. Even today, the Foundation does not have a suitable headquarters or receive any public funding.

Our only wish is to inform the public of his story, as Gaccetta wished, because he wanted people to know and revive the life and works of his Maestro Sfilio and his teachings, just the way they were in the pre-war period.

We also wish to remind readers that he was the only person in possession of the two original editions (impossible to find otherwise at the time) of the “Nuova Scuola Violinistica Italiana” ed. Augusta 1934. It would seem incredible that in the year 2000 a man of 87 would await the final hour of those who could give testimony regarding his career as a violinist before coming out into the open, in order to gain fame and honours at such a venerable age!

However, a person who lived by his side for years and knows his life story as well as Gaccetta, told his version of this story in times when no suspicion was evident (in the 1970s), including the matter regarding the record of “Capricci”. This person is Guido Pizzi and he lives in Sardinia. He could have taken advantage of the situation at the time, as he was much younger then! The Sfilio Foundation has carried out research into the question of the record, but with no avail. However, we can guarantee that Gaccetta died still claiming that he personally recorded Paganini’s Capricci in 1931.

3) The comment that Borer attributes to Sfilio regarding the fact that if Paganini had known his method (Sfilio’s), he would have adopted it himself, is not correct. The extract in question is taken from the text “Alta Cultura di Tecnica Violinistica” and actually reads “I sincerely believe that if I had written my method before the death of this Virtuoso violinist and he had come to hear of it (considering the importance he gave to finger position), he would most probably have adopted my discovery because it frees the bow of all difficulty”. The Virtuoso violinist Sfilio refers to is not Paganini, but the famous violinist Capet.

4) Lastly, for the sake of truth, we wish to testify that Sfilio was much more famous than Philippe Borer’s words would suggest. There is evidence from esteemed authorities, including explicit references to a close Paganini-Sivori-Sfilio lineage. In primis, the declaration made by Zino Francescatti, the famous, Virtuoso Paganini follower.

In an interview with Emilio Pelaia, from the magazine *Clave*, in Buenos Aires (June 1938) he declared that he followed many of Sfilio's methods, in particular those regarding the left hand. In these methods he sees a direct Paganini-Sivori-Sfilio lineage.

“One may note particular similarity regarding the importance given by Francescatti to sense of touch, vibration of the fingers, extension, use of the wrist when changing position and the chromatic scale”. This quotation was made by the famous violinist and scholar, Enzo Porta, in his book “*Il Violino nella Storia*” ed. EDT 2000 (The Violin in history), where he goes into Sfilio's method in great detail.

As Francescatti's father and Maestro Renè studied with Camillo Sivori, his comments evidently not made just by chance. As far as the article by Sfilio dated 7th February 1937 is concerned (quoted by Borer), the Maestro mentions having listened to a Sivori concert during which he performed variations on “Carnival in Venice” and “Moses”, getting a “profound and lasting impression”. It would seem impossible to presume from these comments that Sfilio may have been anything other than a pupil of Sivori's, as the Maestro's position appears to have the sole intent of trying to answer criticism already raised by the academic world regarding the declaration of the discovery of “Paganini's secret”, in particular, in the case of Isaia Billè, the academic, double bass player from Santa Cecilia. Sfilio told Billè how long he had waited to write a long list of remarks which were inspired directly from his style of teaching, the way his pupils learned and the length and depth of his studies in everything related to Paganini, even though he did not open up too much, he more than once made his comments public.

Lastly, he made it clear that Sivori's Paganini-style teachings have been handed down from generation to generation and still survived at the time when he wrote “If my modest opinion of this virtuoso (Sivori) were not to find credit, I would appeal to the concept that Sivori's pupils have handed down his teachings to pupils who are sane of mind and body and live and teach in Genoa today”! Concluding his article, Sfilio expresses his hopes that in 1940, the 100th anniversary of Paganini's death, there would be an important performance of the great Genovese artist's works! In his brief reply dated 21st February 1937 in the daily newspaper, *Il Lavoro*, Billè stated that he had never read the method. Other articles in the 1930s dealt with the matter of the secret Paganini confided to Sfilio. In the same newspaper dated 26th June 1937, Pietro Berri, a well-known Paganini

scholar - as well as being a doctor - published an article entitled "That secret of Paganini's.....Alta Cultura di Tecnica Violinistica" and also wrote: "Paganini's secret is finally unclosed". On 13th July 1937 the daily paper *Il Secolo XIX* published an article written by Ferruccio Zanier entitled "The Secret of Paganini has been unveiled". The article went on to say that "All the technical study of the left hand following Sfilio's method was based on Chromatism". Infact, Sfilio had the great merit of understanding and therefore interpreted fingering to the Paganini scale, Breslavia 3rd August 1829", from a page of one of his albums, chromatic scale in A major, from which one can understand the new fingering of the chromatic scale mentioned so frequently with regard to the Paganini secret.

Many important musicians have given positive feedback, showing their esteem and recognition to Sfilio. After having read Sfilio's method, Franco Alfano realised just what sincere admiration and surprise he always felt when listening to Sfilio's pupils playing their execution (using the Sfilio method) during the period when he was on the diploma examination board in Bologna and Turin.

Other feedback came from important musicians such as Ottorino Respighi, Gino Marinuzzi (orchestra director), Enrico Pierangeli (violin professor at the Liceo Musicale in Turin "G. Verdi". The latter tried out the method and declared that the results achieved went far beyond his wildest expectations. Camille Saint-Saens, whose comments after a Sfilio concert in Montecarlo in 1904 we wish to report in full, said "All my projects have changed. I cannot but send you my greetings, wishing you every success with my works that you execute so well. I will no longer leave for Cannes and Nice. Saint-Saens. I'm leaving today for Italy". (All these comments are collected in a book entitled "Nuova scuola violinistica italiana" - New Italian Violin Technique).

Yet another supporter was the Paganini scholar, Pietro Berri. He's the author of the original preface to the method "Alta Cultura Di Tecnica Violinistica" published in 1937. Luigi Schininà wrote the following regarding chromatic scales. "The fingering is inspired by a precious publication by Sfilio, in which the author, setting off from a hypothetical Paganini scale, according to his contemporary biographers, displays a whole new theory for fingering of

chromatic scales. In Italy, I believe that nobody has as yet put forward such a theory and I am happy to be the first, so as to demonstrate the worthiness of such application. Infact, this new fingering offers clear advantages over the former one.” Schininà’s method entitled “Scales and Arpeggio for violin”, edited by Curci Milan in 1940 is still used in Music Conservatories today.

Emilio Pelaia, a pupil of Sfilio’s and great violin pedagogue, as well as holding a Senior Violin professorship at the Manuel De Falla Conservatory of Music in Buenos Aires, also published a volume in 1956 entitled “Scale Studies for Violin” written by J. Hrimaly (pupil of L. Auer) adding exercises that his Maestro, Sfilio had taught him. He also had the second volume of Sfilio’s “Nuova Scuola Violinistica Italiana” published in 1947. Both were published in the “Ricordi Americana” version. Concerning the latter, we wish to quote recognition of the famous violinist Remy Principe: “Dear Maestro Sfilio, yesterday I heard Maestro Marinuzzi’s daughters play. Though not being personally acquainted with Maestro Marinuzzi’s daughters, I wish to express my sincere satisfaction for having found a colleague who has the same way of conceiving the study method violin. Bravo Maestro! If all your pupils have the same basis that I so admired in the Marinuzzi daughters, your school’s merit shows that it must be one of the most prestigious in Italy. I wish you all the best. Remy Principe” (Violin Professor at the “Accademia Santa Cecilia” in Rome). In her book entitled ““L’arco degli strumenti musicali” The bow of musical instruments”(pub. by G. Zanibon 1981) Lauro Malusi writes: “Regarding the hold and position of the bow, I wish to quote what was written by the great Maestro Sfilio in his book which is as interesting as is it rare: Alta Cultura Di Tecnica Violinistica”.

In “Quaderni dell’Istituto di studi Paganiniani”, issue 14, dated December 2002, Claudio Pavolini dedicates an article to Sfilio under the title “Francesco Sfilio and the Paganini school”, and in the volume “Paganini Divo e Comunicatore” (published by Serel International in 2007) he quotes Sfilio at length in the article entitled “Fonti di Ispirazione del Violinismo Paganiniano” Sources of inspiration of the Paganini Violinist.

In “Nicolò Paganini Diabolus in Musica” (published by Brepols in 2010) Flavio Menardi Noguera entitled an article: “The Ligurian School” of Violin and also writes “It’s necessary to mention in conclusion the matter regarding the famous Paganini “secret” which ought to be called a method. If in 1991 I suggested speaking of a new type of teaching based on a

rational knowledge of the nature of the instrument, today I think I may claim that in the light of the rediscovery of the Sfilio method, this presumption may now be almost considered a certainty. If Sfilio had just been a humble and unknown teacher in the province, his name would never have appeared on an international level as we have mentioned above. In conclusion, we wish to underline the fact that Maestro Gaccetta spent all his money to have the two Sfilio methods re-published and that he always gave lessons free of charge and died in great poverty. Before giving hasty and unfounded opinions on the Sfilio method, we suggest that those interested should experiment the method, study it and go into it in depth! The Sfilio Fondazione is in full agreement with the content of this reply to your article.

Eliano Calamaro and Andrea Franzetti